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NBC story on spying called old news

Subs have eavesdropped on Soviets since '61, experts say

By Bryan Brumley
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Pointing out that U.S. submarines have collected intelligence in Soviet waters for 25 years, experts said yesterday that NBC told the Kremlin nothing new by reporting about underwater eavesdropping.

CIA Director William J. Casey has asked the Justice Department to consider bringing criminal charges against NBC-TV for its mention of the intelligence program and its identification of the code-name as "Ivy Bells."

As early as Aug. 28, 1961, at the height of an East-West crisis over the divided German city of Berlin, the official Soviet news agency Tass complained that foreign submarines had committed "a number of violations against the state seacoast of the Soviet Union" and were "making observations for intelligence purposes."

The NBC report in question, aired Monday on the *Today* show, said that Ronald William Pelton, a former employee of the National Security Agency who has been charged with spying, is suspected of giving the Soviets information on espionage gathering by U.S. submarines, which NBC correspondent Jim Polk said might be code-named "Ivy Bells." Pelton is on trial in Baltimore.

One expert on espionage, James Bamford, described Casey's threat as "the other shoe dropping" after his warning earlier this month that he would prosecute news organizations that report secrets about U.S. electronic eavesdropping.

U.S. submarines began spying against the Soviet Union at the end of the Eisenhower administration, said American University professor Jeffrey Richelson, the author of books on U.S. and Soviet intelligence.

In 1974, the Washington Post described an espionage program similar to Ivy Bells that it said was called "Holystone." That report angered Pentagon officials, who later told reporters it had caused the Soviet Union to improve offshore security.

The next year, the New York Times published more detailed articles on the Holystone program, quoting high-level intelligence and administration sources as describing it as a valuable tool for gathering information at little risk to the collectors.

Among its intelligence coups, the 1975 articles said, were photographing the underside of a Soviet E-class submarine, apparently in Vladivostok harbor, the main naval port on the Soviet east coast, and tapping into undersea cables along the Soviet coast on which the Russians sent military information too sensitive to be broadcast.

After those disclosures, Pentagon officials told the Associated Press that specially equipped U.S. submarines gathered intelligence off Soviet shores, but they denied that any had penetrated that close to the Soviet mainland.

Richelson, who describes the program in his book, *The U.S. Intelligence Community*, said in an interview that he did not believe that the NBC report "is something the Soviets will find valuable. The Soviets knew about it."

Casey may have been angered that NBC linked the submarine spying with the code name Ivy Bells, said Bamford, author of a history of the National Security Agency, the organization that decodes electronic intelligence for the Pentagon.

However, after Pelton's arraignment Nov. 27, his attorney identified Ivy Bells as an electronic intelligence-gathering operation.

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In a report on the arraignment that same day, Polk said that "there are indications that Ivy Bells refers to a Navy eavesdropping operation. The Navy is known to have submarines outside Soviet harbors listening to what the Russians say."

Casey has said he was referring Polk's report of Monday to the Justice Department for possible prosecution. He did not mention the Nov. 27 report.